

BULLYING PREVENTION IN THE U.S. FIRE SERVICE



National Development and Research Institutes, Inc.

NDRI PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

[Sara Jahnke, Ph.D.](#)

Director

Center for Fire, Rescue & EMS Research

National Development and Research Institutes

FUNDING INFORMATION:

[Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) Award EMW-2016-FP-00806

Project Period: 9/1/2017 – 8/31/2020

NDRI CO-INVESTIGATORS: [Carlos Poston, Ph.D.](#), [Keith Haddock, Ph.D.](#)

PROJECT KEYWORDS: Fire Service, Bullying, Resilience

Bullying, Harassment & Resilience in the Fire Service

Purpose and Aims: Bullying has become a critical area of concern in the fire service; from face to face and online intimidation to extreme instances of harassment resulting in assault. These negative behaviors erode safety and teamwork in addition to being in stark contrast to the fire service core values of duty, pride, and tradition and put departments at risk for litigation. Unfortunately, efforts to quantify the extent of the problem remain piecemeal. Without a comprehensive understanding of the scope and root causes of bullying, we cannot estimate its impact on recruitment and retention, possible career disruption, behavioral health outcomes, and suicide risk. This research will collect appropriate information about bullying in the fire service and the prevalence, incidence, risk factors, and consequences of bullying behaviors in the fire service which will be used to inform prevention and intervention efforts.

Relevance: Bullying/hazing and assault in the fire service are underreported and, in many instances, exist as traditionally accepted aspects of the job. Gathering national data on prevalence and incidence rates of bullying/assault in the fire service will allow investigators to objectively quantify the problem and will inform the tailoring of an empirically validated prevention training for departments.

Methods: A mixed-methods research approach will be used to develop a comprehensive picture of the challenges and opportunities for prevention and intervention. This information will be used to develop bystander training modules and inclusive programs/policies that will be pilot tested.

Anticipated Outcomes: The outcome of this research is to aid the fire service community in its mission to prevent bullying/harassment/assault, respond to firefighter mental health issues, and identify ways to improve resilience among firefighters. Data from this research will inform development and pilot testing of a tailored program that is responsive to the unique culture of the fire service.